ORIGIN/ACTION

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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A-102 NO.

CONFIDENTIAL HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

INFO : BANGKOK, CINCPAC. FOR POLAD, DANANG, USDEL FRANCE, VIENTIANE

FROM : Amembassy SAIGON

DATE: July 8, 1971

SUBJECT : Ky Selects Truong Vinh Le as Vice Presidential Running Mate

REF : Saigon 10585

SUMMARY AND COMMENT:

1. While answering reporters' questions following meeting with Mr. Kissinger July 5, Vice President Ky announced that he has selected Mr. Truong Vinh Le, prominent southern Catholic politician and wealthy businessman, as his vice presidential running mate. Le's selection should assist Ky's presidential campaign to a modest degree to draw votes among southerners, Catholics, and minor political parties, which would otherwise most likely go to Thieu. The selection tends to confirm Ky's strategy of attempting to raid Thieu's rather than Minh's constituency. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT

2. Truong Vinh Le confirmed to Embassy officers July 5 that Ky has selected him as his running mate. Le also claimed that some of the parties in his Committee to Coordinate Political Party Activities will support Ky's presidential candidacy. On the same day, [redacted] told Embassy officers that Ky will not exercise his option to name a supplementary vice presidential candidate.

3. Le is a prominent southern Catholic politician and wealthy businessman.
Le is a scion of a family of distinguished journalists, publishers and businessmen, and the grandson of the famous Vietnamese-French scholar, Petrus Ky. He served as President of the National Assembly under Ngo Dinh Diem from 1959 and was a leading member of the Can Lao party. Le retired from public life for several years following the death of President Diem (whom he still reveres) and devoted

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEWED BY [redacted] DATE 1/26/82
PORTIONS EXCISED AS INDICATED

his time primarily to developing his publishing enterprise, the Saigon An Quan. Le formally reentered politics only in 1970 when he headed an unsuccessful Senate slate of VNQDD (Vu Hong Khanh) and renegade Nhan Xa party candidates which placed fourth in a field of 16. Following the Senate election, Le organized a group of 13 political parties (the Coordinating Committee for Political Party Activities) ostensibly to protect the role of parties in the Vietnamese political process. More recently Le began publishing on June 25 a weekly magazine "The Political Parties Platform" which is designed primarily to promote his own political fortunes and to publicize his Coordinating Committee. Most observers discount the present influence of his group and its future prospects, noting that the membership has declined from an initial 18 parties and does not include such prominent parties as the Nhan Xa, Cong Nong and the Progressive National Movement. [b-1 ed told Embassy officers July 5 that at least some member parties would support Ky, particularly the GSF (Greater Solidarity Force) and the various VNQDD branches.

4. Most observers concede that Le is a relatively honest and competent individual, b-1 ed Some fellow Catholics, including Dr. Nguyen Van Tho (former Education Minister) and Nguyen Duc Xich (Secretary General of the Nhan Xa Party) have described Le essentially as a business operator and an unreliable political ally. However, Le is probably the strongest vice presidential candidate which Ky realistically could hope to attract to his ticket. Certainly, Le's age, moderate conservatism, regional origins and religion complement Ky's northern youthful flambovance. His personal wealth, [and his leadership of the Political Party Activities Coordinating Committee are doubtless assets in Ky's campaign. As a well known personage, Le also enjoys some political following, indicated by the fact that his 1970 Senate slate placed third in MR II, III and IV and second in Saigon. Detractors, however, recall that the church did not support his senate bid and add that he owes his relatively good results to unofficial government support. [levertheless told Embassy officers on July 5 that Le will bring 500,000 votes to Ky's ticket in October. On balance, we believe that Le's selection probably will contribute some but not much to Ky's presidential chances and conceivably could cost him some votes among the young electorate who may recall his close Can Lao associations. b-1 ed

BUNKER